

Jann/FYE

(AST)

not for publication
under any circumstances,
at this time

"If scandal forced both Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew to resign tomorrow, making Carl Albert the president, the country would quickly discover the seriousness of the Democrats' depleted intellectual resources. President Albert would presumably honor the commitment of Speaker Albert and the Congressional Democrats by halting the bombing in Cambodia, hiking the minimum wage and releasing all impounded funds. And then he would . . . punt."

So writes David Broder in the Washington Post. And who is to say he is wrong? You can substitute for Carl Albert any name you want, but the result is the same. The liberal left has no program, no agenda, no ordering of priorities for the country. Its response to issues that arise has been largely negative. We are against the bombing of Cambodia - but have little to say about foreign policy generally. We are against pollution - but are ill prepared to say just how the costs of cleaning up the environment should be borne. We are against inflation - but what is our position on wage and price control? We are for welfare reform, we say - but we can add little more if someone asks for specifics.

✓✓ Liberals have been doing a fair job of identifying problems - but have done practically nothing about suggesting solutions. We react piecemeal to each crisis as it arises - the Watergate, the energy crisis, the meat prices. But we have not come forward with the framework that is necessary before satisfactory solutions can be found. It is an honorable vocation to be a critic; and critics do not necessarily have an obligation to advance solutions to problems they identify. But for those of us who believe that there is a possibility - indeed, a necessity - for major change and reform, mere criticism of what is happening is not enough.

How have we come to such a position? Historically, in the past 40 years, the Democratic liberal left has been considered, and rightly, the major fountainhead of ideas for realistic political action. But within the last 10 or 15 years American politics have been dominated by two great moral issues, civil rights and the war in southeast Asia. They have served as litmus tests, as an easy shorthand way of identifying politicians as good guys or bad guys. They have provided a basis of moral outrage for political action.

We no longer have that luxury. This recognition is sometimes articulated in our call to return to the "bread and butter" issues. For we surely understand that a politics insensitive to class does not easily fit into a formula which recognizes the importance of mass based political support. Our real difficulty, however, is in defining, in 1973, just exactly what "bread" and "butter" really mean. Our difficulty is of course partially the result of insensitivity. Opinion makers have never found anything too terribly "sexy" about the death of 10,000 individuals at work each year; or in the hopelessness thousands of men and women experience when they realize that they are destined to a mindless and monotonous work-a-day America.

The issues we face today are more complex and have less obvious moral content, at least when we get down to the specifics that are supposed to be the concerns of politicians and public officials. Consequently we have assumed a reactive position on the Alaskan pipeline, on law and order, on the economy, on welfare

reform.

When we venture beyond merely reacting to the initiatives of a conservative-reactionary administration, our impulse is to revert to the standard New Deal solution; more bureaucracy. Our response to the housing crisis is HUD, to the environmental crisis EPA, to the property crisis OEO. It is hard to kick the habit! With all of this bureaucracy, can we say with any confidence that the people are any better off? Especially those who pay for it - wage earners? In short, we seem as paralyzed by old ideologies and philosophies as we are by the complexity of the new emerging issues and crises.

Quite frankly, we seem unwilling to set up mechanisms for people to solve their own problems, to develop a sense of community and of belonging that is necessary - and usually sufficient - for them to see their own stake in finding solutions to their own problems.

Too long have liberals in effect distrusted the people they purport to serve, and so set up bureaucracies that are responsive to neither the people, nor, ultimately, to the elite liberals themselves. Our failure to trust the people is a self fulfilling prophecy for people who are not allowed access to decisions that influence their lives will soon grow incapable of making them. We realize now that bureaucracy, public or private, is not necessarily the answer; and that overwhelming bureaucracy is one of the major complaints - surfacing in dozens of different ways - of the American people today.

The new found interest in "process" questions is a beginning of what must become a comprehensive review of our political structures and political philosophies. It is a recognition that perhaps one of the reasons we have run amok is a result of the manners in which we do business - select political and corporate leadership, identify and formulate public policy and implement the public will. To date this effort has come within the narrow confines of political party activity, congressional reform and to some extent the question of "corporate responsibility". But for those of us who care about the direction of the country, process alone is not enough. It is necessary but not sufficient; there must be substance too.

Over the years liberals have relied on personalities: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy. These people clearly represented a different philosophy of government than Hoover, Taft, Dewey, Eisenhower and Nixon. But we can rely too much on personalities, on the supposed charisma of political figures. All other things being the same, individual political personalities become victims of conventional institutions. It is no surprise that numerous progressive and well intentioned governors are frustrated in their attempts to effect real change. On the one hand they are constrained by conventional institutions and interests (corporations, bureaucracies, etc.); while on the other, they are simply unable to formulate alternative policy. The fact is, that modern American industrialism pervades the ideologies of both political parties and that when exception is taken to it (Governor Tom McCall's proposal for a no-growth economic strategy) it is received with almost stunning surprise.

Efficiency in government is a good case in point. While it is generally recognized that "productivity" means good politics, there is little likelihood that much will be done to effectively accomplish this. Governmental efforts to date

mantling bureaucracies and once again establishing neighborhood government. In summary, movements and political philosophies must be based on something more than individual personalities, they must be based on very ordinary people. But ordinary Americans will not be moved to political organizing and action absent of political analysis and programs relative to their issues and to their concerns. If they are to be galvanized into a political coalition for change, then they must be presented with an alternative touching on their needs.

What must be done then to respond to this political and philosophical vacuum? Clearly we need more than an individual political personality, for a political strategy must be galvanized around a program - a program offering alternatives. Short of this, we will not only be unable to distinguish leadership capable of implementing effective change strategies, but more importantly, we will certainly be unable to mobilize the kinds of energies and resources needed for political victory.

Consequently, I suggest two projects are in order. First, we need a critique, a coherent analysis of where we are. We already have laundry lists of grievances, sheaves of press releases hastily mimeographed in response to the crisis of the day. Others are certainly better able to write a summary of the ills and breakdowns, and perhaps, even a more colorful description; but we are suggesting distinctly a different job - a critique of where we are.

It means an examination of our economic structures both at home and internationally from a point of view beyond that of standard Keynesian economics. It requires an examination of energy, land use, economic development, and their relationship to the larger issue of consumption - a recognition that more may be less!

The questions of wealth - the terrific scale at which it is being consolidated - must too be squarely confronted. We all finally recognize, at least vaguely, that our current attempts at income maintenance and distribution are terribly inadequate. "Upward mobility" has been little more than a symmetrical invention designed to persuade the great majority of ordinary work-a-day Americans that wine and roses are just around the corner. A look at the numbers soberly brings this home. In 1949 1% of the people owned 21% of the total personal wealth. By 1969 this 1% had extended its control to 40% of the total personal wealth. The distribution of wealth and income then must be a principal concern of any political strategy in the 70's.

There is the question of government. Very simply, most Americans will no longer tolerate politics which offers bureaucracy in place of solutions. For too long we have defined government in such a way as to subsidize the abandonment of responsibilities by states, by neighborhoods, and by individuals. We have designed programs and provided monies for families who choose to send their old and sick to nursing homes, but have none for those who opt for the extended family. There is plenty of support for police, etc. but none for part-time community work by those with a real stake in neighborhoods - the people who live there. Perhaps this realization - that bureaucratic government is not an adequate solution - is best reflected in the way New Yorkers have responded to the issue of crime. Nine years ago we all read of the murder of a young girl while hundreds of on-lookers failed to come to her aid. We called this apathy. But the problem worsened. Incidents of crime skyrocketed and the government; city, state and federal - responded but not to the problem of "apathy". They responded by sending

into the neighborhoods more and more police. That didn't work either. Now, having realized that the solutions to the problems of crime are not forthcoming from City Hall, the state or the federal government, New Yorkers are beginning to take it upon themselves - individually. Increasingly, criminals are apprehended by anonymous people stepping forward. Thousands of neighborhood-organized and administered efforts have sprung up in an attempt to solve this problem. Finally, realizing that the returning of this problem people offers much more prospect for resolution than does an enlarged bureaucracy, the city has funded \$50 million worth of neighborhood run crime control efforts. But we need not wait until governmental efforts collapse before we explore the vitality of re-involving the individual and the neighborhood.

There are more. Certainly. Full employment, humane work and work places, efforts to ease the injuries of race and class prejudice. But we must develop a framework with which to understand these concerns - especially as they relate to one another. Otherwise, our perceptions will remain fragmented and unrelated. We will be paralyzed from making constructive recommendations by the experiences and ideologies of the past.

Second, we must prepare a positive alternative, a set of policy thrust. The reason for this is obvious. The image of what should replace the unsatisfactory present is not yet clear. This is perhaps the more difficult task, for our ideals and yearnings lead us so quickly in perhaps desperate directions. But the task is necessary. For by presenting at least the beginnings of a program - rather than just a list of complaints - we can set forth an agenda of ideas that can structure most Americans' perceptions of their choices in the future. Without policy alternatives we can only grouse, and continue as we have for the past 20 years. We will certainly not capture the energy and imagination necessary in organizing the coalition required for a dramatic change. What is more, should the unlikely situation occur, where we would find ourselves in a position to affect change - without having first developed alternatives to the present - we will, I am afraid, defer to Mr. Broder's description and "punt".

We must keep in mind that we are working under a number of constraints. We are in an age, for better or worse, of an increasingly ideology politics in America. The University of Michigan Research Center report on the 1972 elections shows clearly that growing and sizeable chunks of the electorate are making their voting decisions based on the perceptions of the program. The ideology really, of the candidates, rather than ancestral party preference. Moreover, people who are actively engaged in politics whether in giving money or in political organizing, are increasingly motivated not by the old imperatives of patronage and party machines but by deeply-felt beliefs on what our government should - or should not - be doing.

This represents a major opportunity for those of us who believe that we must have what the American people want - basic change. But there are also dangers. While the electorate has become ideological it has also become cynical in reaction to the welched-on promises of politicians and their refusal to address pressing concerns of ordinary people. The exposure of rampant political corruption has been the final confirmation of these long held suspicions. Consequently the public is cynical about the possibilities of change at the same time it yearns for it.

That means that those advocating change must be careful not to promise more than

they can reasonably expect to deliver. There must be a realization of the limits and the power of government to effect change and a realization that in some areas the best thing that the government can do is enable people and communities to effect change themselves. Unable to deliver on the promises we make, we will only succeed in increasing the already high levels of suspicion of the political process.

But we are talking about a program that does not exist. What are the first steps that we should take? Initially a group of people should come together to resolve three principal questions. First, there must be a definition of the objectives of the analysis. Unless this is accomplished, we will be paralyzed as we are now by the enormity of the job. Second, we must decide on a structure that can produce such an analysis. It is unrealistic to hope that any of this can be done without the full time commitment of several individuals. Even a loosely organized "committee of correspondents" would require substantial resources to organize and operate. Third, a strategy for implementing the critique and program must be developed. As the project is conceptualized and organized, considerable thought must be given to its outcome - its implementation. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of earlier efforts in roughly this direction has been their inability to communicate with a broader segment of society, an inability to translate their recommendations into action. Therefore, from the beginning, we must deal with the political significance of the end product. There will be a vitally important consideration in planning objectives and recruiting the sponsors. To begin, I would recommend the convening of a group of 10 to 20 persons of unique skills and interests and varied backgrounds. As a beginning, the group can draft a proposal on how best to define and accomplish the above two objectives.